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U.S.-Sudan Policy: The Devil is in the Details
USCIRF Calls for Strict Adherence to “Verify, Then Trust”

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In response to the release yesterday (10/19/09) of the Obama administration's long-awaited Sudan strategy, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the comprehensive approach to Sudan, but urges the administration to closely and effectively monitor implementation by Khartoum.

The renewal of the declaration of National Emergency and of U.S. sanctions on Sudan is positive, but USCIRF urges the administration to strictly adhere to its stated “verify, then trust” policy before easing pressures on Khartoum.

“On paper the plan looks good. The devil, as always, will be in the details,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “How will the mixture of incentives and pressures be applied to Sudan? How closely will the administration ‘verify, then trust?’ What are the consequences of non-compliance by Khartoum? Over the past several months, rightly or wrongly, there has been an impression that the United States has softened its stance on Khartoum, and that this has emboldened Khartoum. In carrying out its broad policy, the administration should be sensitive to this present environment. Though details of the new policy are concealed, we at USCIRF will monitor the developing situation in Sudan carefully, as well as continue to engage the administration to ensure that everything possible is being done to bring lasting peace and stability to Sudan.”

Given the history of the National Congress Party (NCP) of making promises, only to break them or to delay their implementation, the administration must closely and effectively monitor Khartoum for any tangible and meaningful improvements or deterioration in the implementation

of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), particularly its provisions relating to peace and security, democratic accountability, and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief.

“USCIRF is pleased with the administration’s renewed focus on the CPA. With less than a year and a half before the January 2011 referendum on self-determination for the South and much of the CPA remaining to be fulfilled, the role of the United States has never been more critical,” said Leo. “The U.S. government and its international partners must be ready to strengthen sanctions and increase pressure on Khartoum should it fail to implement the CPA provisions in a timely manner, hold and abide by the outcome of the South’s self-determination referendum in January 2011, and bring peace to Darfur.”

Outstanding steps include the passage and signing of a referendum law this year, ending tribal violence in the South and the arming of militias involved in that violence, demarcating the North-South border, setting up a parallel process to address post-2011 issues, and engaging on the contested areas of Abyei, South Kordofan State (the Nuba Mountains region), and Blue Nile State. Failure to hold a referendum as scheduled, or to accept the choice of the people of Southern Sudan as to their political future, could return Sudan to a long and bloody civil war.

Sudan was one of the first countries to be a focus of the Commission’s attention. Since its inception, the Commission has met with a broad range of government officials, religious leaders, human rights monitors, civil society representatives, and others knowledgeable about Sudan; held public events to focus attention on religious freedom abuses in Sudan; testified on Sudan at congressional hearings; and visited Sudan three times to see conditions on the ground first hand.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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